

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 842

CE 065 905

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TITLE Popular Education in Latin America. Synthesis of the Discussion Themes. Verhandeligen no. 50.
INSTITUTION Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries, The Hague (Netherlands).
REPORT NO ISBN-90-6443-070-5
PUB DATE Jul 92
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Developing Nations; *Economic Development; *Educational History; Educational Objectives; Foreign Countries; *Popular Culture; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Latin America; *Popular Education

ABSTRACT

The objective of popular education has been associated with the creation of identity of popular groups in society. Education has been considered a key in the process to reform and modernize social structures. In the 1990s, democratic governments have promoted popular participation to solve development problems. This context poses new challenges that have practical and theoretical implications for popular education and evoke new themes for discussion. Innovative methodologies are needed to improve the quality of educational processes. The theme of transmission of knowledge and power appears to be very important. The perspective of an active relationship between educators and students with reciprocal processes of transmission and appropriation places the problem of autonomy of popular groups in a different perspective. Popular education must undertake a new type of analysis that permits an understanding of economic, class, and gender relations from the point of view of indigent cultures. In some cases, new relationships of cooperation with the state must be created to attain a more extensive and national implementation. Popular education must take account of gender differences and promotion of creativity and personal development. The problem facing educators is how to combine leadership with the equalizing discourse on which most of their action is based. (YLB)

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**Popular education in
Latin America**

Synthesis of the discussion themes

**Centre for the study
of education in
developing countries**

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The Hague, July 1992

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Dam, Anke van

Popular education in Latin America: synthesis
of the discussion themes / Anke van Dam,
Sergio Martinic, Gerhard Peter. - The Hague:
Centre for the Study of Education in
Developing Countries (CESO)
(CESO verhandelingen; no. 50)
Met lit. opg.
ISBN 90-6443-070-5
Trefw.: onderwijs; Latijns-Amerika.

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1. Introduction

During the last few years, programmes on popular education have been propagated at large in Latin America. In many countries on this continent, numerous Non-Governmental Organizations and, in some cases, public institutions have assumed the pedagogical principles of popular education for the methodological foundations of the social activities they carry out with the poorest groups in society.

In this region where considerable transformations of political and economic structures have taken place, these experiences, through which the value of daily life and the symbolic dimensions which provide the participants and social movements with an identity, were recognized, were successful in keeping the project going in civil society.

In spite of the significant and numerous experiences with these programmes, it is difficult to find systematical reflections on the activities and, even more difficult, to find an appropriate conceptual approach to treat the theme. This explains the complexity of these social practices, as well as the diversity of attempts to define popular education.

In this article, transformations in the discussion about popular education will be analysed and the main discussion themes currently preoccupying the participants in this pedagogical movement will be synthesised¹. Our working hypothesis is that the socio-political transformations and the development process of these experiences make it necessary to replace these practices in new social screenplays, which also demand an appropriate substantial change in the interpretation and conceptual approach.

To discuss the theme, first a brief historical revision of the development of this pedagogical movement will be given. Afterwards, the progress and discussions will be presented which, from the point of view of the actors, offer new possibilities of theoretical interpretation of these experiences. Our data for analysis are mainly based on the reports and conclusions presented at the seminars on Popular Education in Latin America, held in the Netherlands in 1988 and in La Paz, Bolivia in 1990².

¹ In our view, actors of this pedagogical movement include the institutions and work teams carrying out projects in accordance with the methodological principles of popular education.

² The papers and conclusions of these seminars have been published in:

- Dam van, A., J. Ooijens, G. Peter: Educación Popular en América Latina. La teoría en la práctica. La Haya, CESO Paperback, No. 4, 1989
- Dam van, A., S. Martinic, G. Peter: Educación Popular en América Latina. Crítica y perspectivas. CESO/REDUC, La Haya/Santiago, CESO Paperback, No. 12, 1991

2. Historical antecedents

At the end of the last century, politicians and intellectuals discussed popular education, referring to the necessity to extend the educational system to poor groups, principally indigenous groups, excluded from economic and cultural benefits of society. The consolidation of national states and the attainment of culturally integrated societies required an education that 'educates' people by contributing to their formation as citizens participating in society. To others, the term acquired a more significant meaning at the beginning of this century, referring to educational actions carried out within the rising labour movements. Here, popular education is associated with practices which transmit other values and knowledge than the traditional aristocratic schools. The objective of popular education is associated with the creation of identity of popular groups in society³.

Nevertheless, the ideas of Pablo Freire, disseminated in Latin America in the 1960s, lie at the root of what we now know as the basic points of popular education. His ideas were taken over by the movement for adult education and literacy which, at that time, succeeded in having great influence in the countries of this continent⁴.

Education was thus considered a main key in the process to reform and modernize social structures, and numerous literacy and primary school programmes, meant for the poorest groups in society, were organized.

Gradually, it was recognized that specific methodologies were needed, which differed from children's education. Further, the conceptual principles changed and in the 1970s the central focus was on permanent education. The learning process was aimed at improving the conditions of life. Efforts were directed at initiating a consciousness-raising process, during which the given group gained insight into the causes of hunger, illness and poverty, and which made them look for possibilities to overcome these. The participants were seen as subjects trying to achieve their own goals and actively participating in the decision process. Paulo Freire's ideas have been of great influence on the development of these kinds of educational projects. Freire takes as a starting point the interrelationship between education and society. The basic principle of education is no longer a 'deposit' of knowledge (what is called the banking system) but the real-life situation of the participants.

³ For an analysis of the historical development of popular education, see: A. Puigross: **La Educación Popular en América Latina**. México, Ediciones Caballito, Biblioteca Pedagógica, 1986.

⁴ It is not the purpose of this article to investigate in depth the ideas of Paulo Freire. About this theme, see: R.M. Torres: **Educación popular: un encuentro con Paulo Freire**. Quito, CECCA-CEDECO, 1986.

In the 1980s, as a consequence of the crisis of political systems and the formation of authoritarian political regimes, popular education acquired more influence. Actors and social movements reappreciated the culture and daily life of popular groups and the actions to promote a social transformation are centred among these groups. These experiences are conceived as a special political practice for the construction of an alternative culture or a new hegemony. The 'recontextualization' of the ideas of A. Gramsci and the critical reflection of the Latin-American Left Wing contributed to a new theoretical and practical perspective to popular education. These experiences are considered the pedagogical element in the constitution of the new social subjects, which, in turn, are conceived to be more associated with cultural identities than with the traditional class categories that are derived from classical marxism. Popular education is thus conceived as a cultural action in a broad sense, carried out in widely divergent circles of society⁵.

Those projects are promoted which, dealing with the dimensions of knowledge and culture, achieve the participation and organisation of popular groups in solving their daily problems. In brief, an educative dialogue relationship is searched for between educators and students and a flexibility in the limits dividing specialized knowledge from the knowledge of daily life common sense. This educational action questions the existing power relations and contributes to the development of the expression and identity of the most excluded groups of society.

Most of the experiences developed in the 1980s attached too much importance to the political aspects. No doubt, the social context of Latin America -military dictatorships in most countries- influenced this fact. In practice, these experiences formed real alternative spaces in which cultural feelings and social movements opposing the dictatorial governments were 'recombined'.

In the 1990s the situation changed radically. In most of the countries, democratic governments are established promoting popular participation each with their own intensity, in order to solve their development problems. This context places popular education before new challenges. Quality of popular education must improve by making use of more pedagogical specialization and, as occurs in various countries, new forms of institutional organization of their work must be assumed. In some cases, new relationships of co-operation with the State must be created in order to attain a more extensive and national implementation. In others, the specifications of the experiences must be redefined in order to innovate methodologies, as well as to improve the quality of educational processes. Those challenges have a series of practical and theoretical implications affecting the discourse

⁵ See: Brandao, C.R.: *A questao política da Educação Popular*. Sao Paulo, Brasil, Ed. Brasiliense, S.A.

on popular education, its methods and working practices and they evoke new themes for discussion. In the next paragraphs we briefly discuss these themes.

3. Towards the construction of a new discourse on popular education

Educational instructors promoting these sorts of experiences agree that popular education passes through a particular crisis, concerning both the discourse and practical work.

In fact, the discussion about popular education was mainly ideological and stressed the political significance of the activities transforming the authoritarian dominant structures. Popular education tried to analyse and reveal the dominant structures of society and protested against these structures as an alternative movement announcing a new society. Acting on culture and relations of knowledge was conceived as a key-dimension to transform the power relations in society.

Nevertheless, practices are not recognized in the discourse nor in the different interpretations of the discussion. There is a difference between the promised great changes and the specific transformations which are obtained in a community or in a basic group. The messages transmitted by the instructors are reinterpreted by the participants in accordance with their culture and historically learned logic, in order to face survival and the power structures affecting them. The planned strategies thus depend on social, economic and cultural mediations that redefine a totally new direction of the projects.

In emphasizing the macro-social dimensions and the political objectives, no attention was paid to everyday dimensions and the symbolic specificity of cultural work of the projects. Reporting on the results of their activities, the instructors emphasized the 'changes in consciousness', 'organizational development' and the formation of 'social subjects', forgetting that these aspects are long-term processes which do not depend exclusively on the activities of a popular education project. Because of this emphasis, other aspects such as the conflicts produced by the innovating experiences in a community, the pragmatic use of the economic resources distributed by a project and the power relations confirmed by the institutions by means of the pedagogical link, were neglected. In short, it concerned the negotiation processes, regarding both the interpretations and the activities resulting from the combination of different cultural aspects⁶ in each project.

⁶ The contributions of Sylvia Schmelkes are very instructive with regard to this theme: *"Potencialidades y problemas de la educación popular en torno a la calidad de los procesos de formación"* and of Sergio Nilo: *"Evaluación de la educación no formal: apuntes metodológicos sobre categorías de análisis y evaluación de los proyectos"*. Published in: Dam, A. van et al., 1991 op.cit.

By denying or not disposing of these categories when analysing this type of process, popular education projects have reproduced their own exterior. Indeed, they have been organized on behalf of the discourses and characteristics of the promoting institutions rather than on behalf of negotiations with the basic organizations and, ultimately, the power of the educators has not been disputed or redetermined in the pedagogical activities to be implemented⁷.

Nowadays, concern about this kind of process is perceived in debates of the educators. This tendency has been the result of the 'crisis of the ideologies' that affected Latin America and of the importance that popular education projects have acquired in different countries. Indeed, these are ongoing experiences which retain, transform and redetermine their space in society. To understand their specificity and to guarantee their efficiency another perspective is necessary.

To get this reflection going, contributions of a new paradigm formed by several social disciplines can be instructive. This paradigm displaces economy and ideology as the linking principle of the interpretations and focuses on language and culture. In essence, it is claimed that a democratic society has to recognize identities and propagate processes which contribute to mutual understanding of the actors and their cultures. It is a case of creating a communicative logic, i.e. focused on mutual understanding, rather than on economic understanding, on private interests and competition. On the other hand, this new perspective implies a close link between language and action, abandoning the distinction between subject and object, between theory and practice.

It would be premature to say that we are confronting a new consolidated and disseminated paradigm. Yet, we are witnesses to a period in which new concepts concerning society and practice of the subjects are accepted. It is important that discussions on popular education are brought nearer to reflections taking place in other areas and spheres of knowledge. In this sort of dialogue, popular education can enrich the interpretation of its practices and, at the same time, contribute experiences and reflections. The main contributions are:

- a. The appropriation and appreciation of daily life as a political dimension, of the importance of experiences gone through and of everyday logic. From this point of view, society and macro-social processes are considered differently.

⁷ The theme of transfer and power of the instructors is in more detail in the articles by Sergio Martinic: "*Transferencia y lógicas de acción en los proyectos de educación popular*" and Victor Hugo Cárdenas: "*Algunas reflexiones sobre cambio cultural y educación popular*". Published in: Dam, A. van, 1991, Op. cit.

- b. The recovery of socio-cultural logic as opposed to economic logic -the latter inherent in the neo-liberal system- to understand, for example, how subsistence economies function, the rationality of the strategies implemented in order to survive and obtain assistance resources, the meaning of numerous social activities allowing for comprehension of the processes of local leadership formation, reproduction and re-creation of group identities, etc. Assuming the cultural logic of popular groups, the problems of efficiency and reasonableness are considered differently^{*}.
- c. The contrast between the ethic of the neo-liberal model -market-economy based on individuality and competition- and the utopia of popular education based on the ethic of communication, dialogue, social responsibility, democracy, justice, equality of rights, etc. reinforcing community spirit and solidarity.
- d. The recovery and reappreciation of the pedagogical concept of popular education in which efficient learning processes for adults, transmission of knowledge related to the specific knowledge of the groups and their daily experiences, group work, link of knowledge with production, etc. have been designed.

4. Methodological questions on popular education

In spite of the significance of the methodological contributions of popular education, little has been said about its basic ideas, procedures and practical results.

Too often, methodology is conceived of as a series of techniques for the educator to work with, without any indication of how to use them, or what the contents of this process should be. The educator lacks a point of departure to initiate processes of change. The educational process is a complex one and the educator should be well equipped. The educator is a specialist who should have the possibility to make adaptations, thus avoiding the danger of a mechanical exercise of methodology. That is why training of educators is recommended, not only in the sphere of managing the techniques, but also with regard to the sustaining conception.

Until now, the dialectical method has often been considered to be the only correct method in popular education. However, it is often used in a mere schematic way, without a proper content. It is important, in this context, to link the methodology used with the contents of the educational process. Import-

^{*} This theme is investigated in more depth in the articles by Walter Delgadillo: *"La educación popular en el sindicato y la educación popular de las instituciones; contrastes y perspectivas en el caso de Bolivia"* and Sylvia Schmelkes, 1991. Op.cit. In: Dam, A. van et al., 1991. Op.cit.

ant elements in this process are identity, social change and the concept of modernization. The link between these four elements should be maintained during the educational process. It requires a strong internal group identity, a sense of mutual solidarity, a readiness to participate and contribute to the attainment of a different social reality, and a form of autonomous development within the process of national development.

For this reason, the participatory character of a project cannot be reduced to the application of any technique. It is necessary to take into account the global conception of the educational process and how the project can solve the two basic aspects of the pedagogical action: the transmission of knowledge and the learning process of the participating group.

During these experiences, the problem of transmitting of the subject-matter of teaching has been the theme of numerous debates. The starting point is that popular education is not supposed to transmit knowledge that does not comply with reality and culture of the participating group. On the contrary, it is supposed to recover the knowledge resulting from the experiences of the subjects with the object of legitimising it for society.

At the same time, the educational process implies a process of intervention in which the knowledge of the group (popular knowledge) is confronted with that of the educator. An open mind on the part of the educator to understand the ideas of the participating group is essential in order to prevent an authoritarian and dominant attitude within this relation. Taking into account the knowledge of popular groups, criticizing the authoritarian tendencies was a considerable contribution to social change, but it could not clear up the difficult relationship between theory and practice. For that reason, popular education needs every kind of knowledge, both from academic institutions and from the relationship between student and educator.

Many projects prove that linking up the transmitted technical knowledge to the logic of the popular way of thinking and its particular way to determine causes and explanations, has failed. For example, a considerable distance exists between the 'scientific' knowledge of an agriculturist, a doctor or a professional book-keeper and the practical and accumulated knowledge of a 'campesino' of how to cultivate his land, to explain an illness or to do a complicated calculation without making use of the formal and legitimate procedures. The way to classify and order the experience in time and space is different. If knowledge is not connected with its deep-rooted structures, i.e. with the level of its 'production codes' mutual enrichment and real intercultural communication are limited.

This kind of process explains, for example, why popular groups often do not 'appropriate' the knowledge and methodological procedures as transmitted and conceptualized by the educators⁹. In other cases, an evident consequence of acting in groups of different cultures is, most of the time unconsciously, a different interpretation of expectations or cultural invasion¹⁰. This problem has been seriously documented in the case of projects implemented with 'indígenas', 'campesinos' and also with women¹¹. In the last case it was also emphasized that the distinctions of gender have their peculiarity in the interior of cultures like Aymará or Quechua.

On the other hand, the transmission of external knowledge in those experiences which could be useful for popular groups should not be neglected. If only group-knowledge is taken into account, the educator denies his own participation in the educational process, afraid to overwhelm or transmit unfamiliar knowledge. He does not offer his answers to questions and the research of a group and he reduces his actions to the technical or methodological management of a meeting. The contents and quality of his educational work are no longer a problem to be concerned about. This attitude undervalues the relational and communicational character of the pedagogical process, avoids the conflict and denies the power that the educator, working with a group, exercises by his presence and control of the methodology.

5. Transmission of knowledge and the problem of autonomy of popular groups

Looking at the problem from a different angle, we can say that all projects attempt to transmit knowledge and methodological procedures to the groups they are working with. In many cases, the proper groups are even stimulated to formulate new projects and to continue their work activities in an autonomous way, without the help of the educators or of an NGO. This process is called 'transmission' of knowledge and resources.

The transmission has taken place in an educational area where different interpretations and cultural identities are expressed. Every one of the participants involved has his own specificity, cultural perspective and language. There is no unilateral and vertical transmission of knowledge. The trans-

⁹ See: Sergio Martinic: Op. cit.

¹⁰ In this context the articles by Jose Antonio Arrueta: '*Reflexiones sobre educación popular y cambios culturales en Bolivia*' and by Victor Hugo Cárdenas, 1991. Op. cit. In: Dam, A. van, 1991, Op. cit. are interesting

¹¹ Please refer to the article by Virginia Guzmán: '*Mujer, desarrollo y educación popular*'.

mitted knowledge is reinterpreted and 'recontextualized' by the students. Indeed, a real case of cultural negotiation and reinterpretation of the contents and work procedures is taking place.

However, the idea of exchange and negotiation is, usually, not incorporated in the strategies of the projects. Generally, the educators define the procedure of transmitting knowledge, appropriated information and resources towards the participants, but they do not have a strategy or methodology to recover and systematize the learning process and knowledge they acquire through their practical experience. Consequently, there is no reflection adapted to the way of thinking and use of words of the educators while practising. Thus, the possibility to develop their own speciality and specific character in educational activities is neglected¹².

This perspective of an active relationship between educators and students with reciprocal processes of transmission and appropriation places the problem of autonomy of popular groups in a different perspective. Generally, educators consider this autonomy as independent control of the participants over the management and resources of their actions. However, and according to practical experiences in the projects, autonomy of popular groups is possible, i.e., a control over the activities to be developed, while maintaining an active relationship with the educators with regard to the management and resources of a project. For example, when a popular organization decides to develop a certain productive strategy or to make a request to the government, specialized help of the educators could be necessary in order to make better technical proposals, to manage the resources to achieve or to evaluate the programmed activities. This kind of relationship must not necessarily be seen as one of dependence, but rather as a relation of co-operation, or even as a relationship of allies, which will be transformed in the course of time.

Thus, it is possible and desirable to conceive projects as action programmes, which pre-suppose the interaction between different participants, in the course of which control and power relations will be transformed. The autonomy that popular groups will build up depends, among other things, on the capacity of a project to: a) transfer a methodological procedure that inspires confidence in the capacities and knowledge of all participants, b) generate opportunities and discussion moments for collective decision making, and c) create confidence in taking risks and accepting conflicts which occur when popular groups or educators feel compromised by accepting alternative actions.

¹² The problems of transmission are investigated in more depth in: S. Martinic, 1991. *Op. cit.* In: Dam, A. van, 1991. *Op. cit.*

This active and critical dialogue enables recognition of the difference and the growing autonomy of groups in the context of an intercultural communication.

6. Culture and Popular Education

The specific work area of popular education is focused on symbolic or cultural aspects. Culture can be defined as the production and transmission of ideas formulated by a group to give orientation to their action in society. It is the symbolic dimension through which groups construct their identities, communicate and recognize their differences and identities¹³.

In daily life, popular groups interact with a hegemonic culture by which they are disqualified. In religious ceremonies, in economic organization, at school, in health institutions, etc., popular groups have to make contacts with forms of communication and knowledge, which are not only different of their own forms but are also considered as being competent and authorized to act in certain circumstances, relations and places¹⁴. So, popular groups must speak, understand and act according to an interpretation of reality considered valid and legitimate, but different from their own interpretations and experiences.

These relations do more than just demand submission. On the one hand, there is the acceptance of its rules, because without accepting them, one takes the risk of perceiving oneself as incompetent, abnormal and antisocial¹⁵. On the other hand, there is the recognition of the legitimacy of the one who is speaking and of its discourse within the institutional framework in which this is expressed and considered valid¹⁶. In this way, each social structure is represented in the communicative and cul-

¹³ The theme of culture is discussed in the articles by Ricardo Cetrulo: "*Cambio cultural y educación popular*" and those of José Antonio Arrueta, 1991. Op. cit. In: Dam, A. van et al. 1991. Op. cit.

¹⁴ M. Chauí calls this knowledge 'competent discourses', which find their inspiration in a supposed reality of the facts and efficiency of the means of action that has lost the connection with its place and original time. The 'competent discourse' rebuilds the knowledge, which is not understood as a construction or elaborated plan, but as an instituted interpretation prefiguring reality. See: M. Chauí: *Cultura e democracia. O discurso competente e outras falas*. São Paulo, Ed. Moderna, 1984, p. 7.

¹⁵ Chauí, M., 1984. Op. cit. p. 13.

¹⁶ "La reconnaissance de la légitimité de la langue officielle n'a rien d'une croyance expressément professée, délibérée et révocable, ni d'un acte intentionnel d'acceptation d'un norme; elle est inscrite à l'état pratique dans les dispositions qui sont insensiblement inculquées à travers d'un long et lent processus d'acquisition par les sanctions du marché linguistique..." (Bourdieu, 1982: 36). Considering the school as a valuable institution includes recognizing its power to correct and evaluate forums of popular expression, at the same time recognizing its legitimacy to impose the official language (Bourdieu, 1982: 53).

tural exchange¹⁷. The most significant contribution of popular education is breaking through or interrupting this process of reproduction and contributing to the appreciation of the culture of the groups. Beside in unification, popular education is interested in the differentiation and expression of the various identities.

Historically, cultural processes in Latin America have been associated with the denial of diversity and the dissemination of homogeneity¹⁸. Even worse, modernity was considered as the imposition of the one and only rational and legitimate logic, subordinating and destroying other logics and ways of thinking for being 'primitive', 'non rational' or 'alienating'.¹⁹ Examples of this imposition are the conquest by the Spaniards, coupled with the preaching of the gospel by the missionaries, the consolidation of national states according to linguistic uniformity, and by associating modernity with a 'scientific' vision of reality or a link with the market rules. Wider internal social distances, negligence of the development and the reduction of the capacity of national cultures to produce profound and legitimate consensus in society were the consequences of these processes. Briefly, the applied cultural politics did not allow the diversity of subjects and ethic and linguistic bases for rich and complex communication, recognition and expression.

People working in popular education had the intuition to appreciate and work for diversity. It has included a pedagogical part, in which popular groups expand their knowledge and develop their expressivity. However, in the past, popular education also contributed to reproducing the criticized cultural distinctions. For example, when the exclusive value of popular thinking, of 'the working class', of 'the ethnic minorities' or of 'the basis' was made absolute. In those cases, the critical reflection of the specific interpretations and concepts of the participating groups are hindered, and the access to a universal knowledge, which is not an exclusive patrimony of the hegemonic classes, is not possible. Ultimately, the codes and symbolic resources, which increase the power of popular groups, are not socialized for communication in society or for implementation in practice of actions based on their language and cultural experience.

One of the main points in the discussions on popular education is the 'indígena' issue. Frequently, the analysis on this subject was made in a unilateral way from a class or ethnic perspective. For not

¹⁷ See: Bourdieu, P., 1982. *Op. cit.* p. 31 and 61.

¹⁸ See the article by Victor Hugo Cárdenas: *Op. cit.*

¹⁹ The theme of modernity related to the item of the 'indígenas' is discussed in more detail in the article by Jorge Rivera: *Op. cit.*

imposing an occidental or external vision, processes of differentiation and transformation of the proper 'indígena' cultures and its meaning to the regional and national power dynamics have not been analyzed. On the other hand, popular education projects often carry, implicitly, an occidental message. As mentioned, the pedagogical methodology, usually, is not related to the principles organizing the line of thoughts of 'indígena' cultures; proposed organizational and leadership structures are opposed to the historical forms existing within a certain 'comunidad'. In brief, popular education must make an auto-critical document contributing to a new type of analysis, which permits to understand, for example, the economic, class and gender relations from the point of view of the 'indígena' cultures and, in turn, from the power and conflict dynamics of national society²⁰.

In conclusion, it can be said that the problem of modernity must be accepted from a different perspective. Until now, this problem has been associated with cultural uniformity, industrial development and the predominance of neo-liberal principles in all spheres of society²¹. Considering culture as a main characteristic of our society and therefore as the communication basis and link of our diversity provides immense possibilities for creating a new political culture which thoroughly democratizes the dynamics of our societies. Such perspective does not stand in the way of economic development and growth.

7. State, power and popular education

As mentioned, popular education intended to transform the symbolic structures which reproduce the domination of daily life activities of the subjects. That is how it contributes to creating a new political culture in order to guide the actions of the organizations. The main goal of this new political culture is the recognition and admission of diversity and alternative actions created from the cultural views of each social actor. The objective has been an increasingly growing power and efficiency of the organizations in their specific spheres of action and in their capacity for influencing the subject matter and the procedures of social politics designed by the state.

From this point of view, the state is considered to be an intermediary institution between civil society and political society. Here, contradictions and diversities of the society are expressed and reproduced.

²⁰ See the article by Victor Hugo Cárdenas: *Op. cit.*

²¹ See the article by Jorge Rivera: *Op. cit.*

The state is not seen as a mere instrument of domination of one class by another, and transformation of the state does not imply its appropriation by an 'attack'. The perspective assumed by popular education could form part of the tradition that values the processes of hegemonic construction as the key-dimension of social change and permanent transformation of a plurality of coexisting and interrelating powers²².

The process of popular education permitted the development of a new conception of power. However, a systematization and clear reflection must still be achieved; a reflection on the type of power built up by the projects and, particularly, on the processes and mechanisms that must be assumed to assure that the new local developed power relations have relevance in a national space and can be incorporated into major structures, such as the government, the parliament and into the practice of the political parties.

Numerous experiences in popular education offer interesting contributions to such a perspective. In fact, many programmes are executed in physical spaces like the district, the 'community' or the region and the problems of local power are considered as the central point in discussions. Also local development opens up a new perspective for the NGOs because of their relations with social organizations and the state.

On the other hand, it is interesting to stress the significance of those programmes that consider the law and its consequences for popular groups as an educational space. One of the principal cultural instruments of domination is a popular group's ignorance of law. A critical reflection on the practice and concept of law, such as giving insight into this theme and its application, give the affected popular groups the possibility of increasing their power in numerous dimensions of their daily lives. On the basis of this kind of experience, new work arises directed at those who elaborate and dictate the law and those who apply it in practice. During the seminars, interesting experiences were presented with regard to the practice of lawyers and actions of civil education carried out in some countries according to the methodology of popular education²³.

In the new democratic context of Latin America, popular education intends to exercise its influence on the design and implementation of social politics. Thus it is accepted that popular education does not

²² See the article by Ricardo Cetrulo: *Op. cit.*

²³ We refer to the articles by Gloria Torres: '*Reflexiones en torno a algunas prácticas jurídicas con sectores poblacionales*', by Pedro Vera: '*Propuesta de educación ciudadana para la democracia*' and by Eduardo Castillo: '*Educación popular y Estado: una experiencia de trabajo con pueblos indígenas*'.

exclusively belong to the NGOs and that similarly oriented programmes can be implemented by governmental institutions, which consider the problems from a macro and mass perspective. The participation of popular groups in the design and development of systems for application of politics was appreciated as an important contribution to the transformation of society. Experiences that stood out are the actions of the Ministry of Education of the State of Sao Paulo, Brasil²⁴ and the actions developed by women's organizations in several countries of Latin America. With different levels of success, women succeeded in transforming their private and daily problems as a whole into a public discussion theme and objective of social politics. In some countries, public institutions for women have been established or new areas of power have been reached on the basis of which global and legitimate politics debilitating patriarchal uses and customs can be designed. This has contributed to making society aware of the issue of the oppression of women. This is a new area for popular education projects²⁵.

8. Women and popular education

In general, concepts and practices of popular education have not taken into account the problems of women. In the 1960-1970s, educational activities were focused on rural and urban productive groups, working men, peasants, excluding women situated in social spaces different from those of men. Only recently, popular education has recognized the specificity of gender relations. Now, attention is focused on the strengthening of social organizations, education which takes account of gender differences and promotion of creativity and personal development²⁶.

Two types of projects developed for women can be distinguished: one focuses on the development of activities to ensure the well-being of the family and the community. Their objective is providing for the immediate needs of women in poor sectors to facilitate their work as mother, wife, or inhabitant of the poor district. The other type of projects focuses on equality and intends to improve the productivity of female activities in the market and at home. They try to give women a better position in society, as well as in the work environment and in their representation in politics. Another important

²⁴ This experience is explained in detail in the article by Moncir Gadotti: *"Educación popular y Estado"*.

²⁵ Regarding the theme 'women in popular education projects', see the articles by Anke van Dam: *¿Existe una metodología de género?* and by Virginia Guzmán: *Op. cit.*

²⁶ See Virginia Guzmán: *"Mujer, desarrollo y educación popular"* in: Anke van Dam, Sergio Martinic, Gerhard Peter. *Op. cit.*

objective is to make women conscious of their subordinated position, creating a new gender identity and linking up the organizations in an extensive women's movement²⁷.

Both types focus on women in poor sectors, their groups and basic organizations. These organizations are in search of an answer to the economic, social and political problems of women for whom the organizations represent a way to survival. The activities remain connected with their traditional role as mother and wife.

However, participation frequently changes women's ideas and behaviour. Women leave their homes, exchange experiences, widen their social networks elaborating their personal self-respect.

Generally, both types of projects attain certain consciousness raising aspects regarding woman's subordinated position. Projects aiming at the well being of women developed more self-respect, personal security, own social space, visible forms of participation. Projects emphasizing equality have contributed to the discussion on the division of work between men and women, the socialization and unequal distribution of power between men and women. The relational character of women's situation is insisted upon, as a result of the unequal social relation established by men and women in different cultures. This relation produces social identities, forms of behaviour, organization of social life and the symbolic world regarding male and female representations.

In spite of these achievements, there still exist questions and specific problems concerning the experience with women's groups.

The gender problem exercises an influence on all aspects of social life, so it is necessary to analyse the different themes of education, starting from this new gender perspective. Gender identity is both the main focus of the educational process of women, and the process permitting the link with a wide social movement without losing this identity. However, little is known about the process of transition of small groups to larger social movements.

Thus, the relationship between basic groups, social organizations and women's movements forms an essential discussion theme. Consolidation of the organization of basic groups and of their social identity is an explicit aim of popular education programmes. As mentioned, these groups often live in poor social or economic conditions, with hardly any access to facilities and decision making processes. The position of women is specific in these cases. During a social, economic or political crisis,

²⁷ See Virginia Guzmán. *Op. cit.*

women are often the first to organize and protest against bad housing conditions, the violation of human rights, the low quality of education for children. It is also the women who organize in economic entities to develop survival strategies. Organization means leaving their isolated position and searching for possibilities to enhance their identity. However, women joining mixed organizations usually have little power at the decisionmaking level. On the other hand, the activities of women within specific women's groups are hardly appreciated by the outside world, nor are they placed in a political dimension, as is the case with activities of other social movements.

It is important that women start specific groups in which they can create their own space and develop their own methodology, focusing on the importance and significance of the organization of women. On the other hand, it is necessary to create a mixed space for co-operation and concerted action. Within this space of co-operation, women, together with men, must construct a new form of power²⁸. Working with women implies working in relationship, incorporating men into the work of women.

This means that, working from this gender perspective, popular education must consider the cultural diversities and the solidarities of men and women as a class and ethnic group. The aim is not to create one unique model, but to construct more equalizing gender relations within each culture.

In the design of women's programmes, some specific aspects deserve attention. For one thing, it is essential to consider that any activity on the women's part is necessarily superimposed on an extensive household task. The improvement of the family's conditions should not be achieved at the expense of women's conditions. So, a difference must be made between gender necessities of the family and those of the community. Also, research should be directed at the question in how far programmes still continue the repression of women. Research should also pay attention to the economic results of these programmes, as these are often disappointing.

While working with women, those educational propositions trying to unite all women must be avoided. The only acceptable proposition is the one, that makes the educational processes take into account the existing differences between each group, as a result of their specific insertion in an existing reality and their special conditions as women living in a determined reality.

²⁸ This new form of power is connected with a new form of making a policy in which daily life, also private life, is part of the politics. Power is transformed into more democracy. Here are no manipulations nor orders. On the contrary, everyone's opinions are taken into account, discussions are taking place within the community and concerted propositions are made.

This can only be realised when an impulse is given to investigate and study the problems of concrete cases, which is a fundamental task of the educational job. In this way, affluent subject-matter of teaching and methodological propositions are arising, which give a real answer to the specific problems. Continuing in the sense as mentioned means that the recuperation of identity is the central point of the educational process of women. The objective of educational work is to generate processes that make women conscious of their subordinate position in order to change their situation for the better.

In this context we are talking about a gender methodology. Key concepts of this methodology are gender relations and gender identity. The gender methodology emphasizes social and cultural inequality between men and women. The result of such a methodology is a critical debate on women's subordinate and discriminated situation, the activation of a critical capacity and reflection in search of transforming propositions, the start of conscious-making processes and the generation of a new gender identity, the search for a collective identity which encourages women's participation, the consideration of women's reality and experiences as the starting-point incorporating personal, social, political, intellectual and emotional aspects, the relation of gender to class and ethnic groups considering women's identity in a wider context²⁹.

In the past, little attention has been paid to the investigation of women's problems. For this reason, until recently few materials were available. Now the importance of an appropriate investigation as a resource of information and educational feed back is emphasized. Recently, an impulse was given for more investigation. However, much has to be done.

A crucial element in the educational process for women to recuperate searching for the creation of a new identity, can be found in their historical place in the organization, the district, society and in their personal history. A 'resignification' only can be achieved by re-elaborating the past. Personal, family, work, community and organizational aspects must be integrated in educational programmes for women. The aim of this process is linking that which society has tried to separate: public sphere and private sphere.

²⁹ See Anke van Dam: 'Existe una metodología de género?' in: Anke van Dam, Sergio Martinic, Gerhard Peter. Op. cit.

9. Schooling of the educator

Because of the lack of appropriate evaluations and systematizations of educational activities little is known about the pedagogical relations between educators and participants. There is little information about perceptions and expectations of the group, or about the transformations that pedagogical experiences produce in the participants' daily lives.

Two types of educational experiences that also define different roles for the educator can be defined. In the type in which the educator accepts the role of 'facilitator' the 'animation' is emphasized. In the other one, the educator accepts the role of 'forming person' and training is stressed. In this last case, the educator must know the subject-matter of teaching, that is to say, he must investigate and increase his knowledge making an analysis of his own practice.

The task of the popular educator is to attain a more integral vision of popular problems with a professional and specific solution to the actual problems. The challenge is in helping to bring together two aspects in one action: the subjects (individual and personal) and the group necessities.

In Latin America, professionals from different disciplines are brought together by a network of Non-Governmental Organizations specialized in educational work, that has been built up to some extent. The educational practice and working with a participatory method questions many basic aspects of the training of these professionals.

Until now, there has been neither the time, nor the possibility to elaborate in more depth on an 'alternative' formation, that consolidates another profile of professional practice. However, in the last couple of years, knowledge about management and administration of projects, design of pedagogical actions and socio-cultural investigations that could be useful in the afore mentioned formation process, have been accumulated.

Educators trained on the job by this type of project also tend to 'make a profession' of their job. Facing the new challenges of efficiency and larger quantities of educational work they demand a technical training, rather than an ideological one. Consequently there are significant challenges for those promoting this type of educational action. Facing such themes and challenges, it is evident that the implementation of popular education needs to be investigated further.

When the educator assumes a specialized role, the horizontal relationship between educator and participants needs to be redefined. There were tendencies to confuse the value of equality in affective and human terms with pedagogical equality. However, the last one does not exist: educator and participants accept specific and different tasks. Not differentiating the roles leads to attitudes, such as the one that states 'nobody educates nobody'. That is how, for lack of leadership and contributions to the process, immobility occurs.

The 'intervention' feature of any popular education experience needs to be stressed. This means that action is intentionally taking place in a reality in order to produce transformations or results, generally, in a previously determined direction. The educator acts in a specialized way, has the knowledge and has the disposal of useful methods to develop the proposed task. He also has some power with regard to the educational relationship he establishes with the participants.

It remains important for the educator to be aware of the fact that, from a certain point of view, he has more knowledge and he should look for ways to manage this situation, without lapsing into the traditional and hierarchical relations. The educator's surplus of knowledge should be coupled with a democratic structure in the learning process.

10. Conclusions: suggestions and perspectives

In this article we contend that popular education programmes must take care of the quality of the implemented pedagogical processes. This implies, among other things, the analysis of the transfer of knowledge, the investigation of the pedagogical relationship to be established between educators and students and the systematical analysis of the practical results to be achieved during the experience.

The basic hypothesis of popular education has been that changing knowledge and representations of popular groups with regard to reality also transforms their social action in everyday life. So, the specific pedagogical character consists of the transformations which are produced in the symbolic dimension of social life.

The development of these educational practices shows that these changes emphasized the ideological dimension of the problem, that is to say, the vision of popular groups regarding the societal and power structures affecting them. In this way, an attempt was made to contribute to the constitution of social subjects, which have identity and political voice in society.

This emphasis has neglected other dimensions, which are often considered as micro-social and of little relevance. We refer, for example, to knowledge, social relations and proper cultural practices of a certain group. In some cases, the ideology was stressed too much. Consequently, a popular way of thinking was considered a non-critical vision on the world that had to be transformed. It also valued the popular way of thinking in such a way that any scientific or technical knowledge was considered as strange and invading.

The critical reflection we discussed in this article, intends to look at the problem from a different angle. First, attention is paid to the epistemological questions of the relation or 'articulation' of originally different knowledge, and, second, the consequent methodological and didactical problems are stressed.

Popular education experiences enable the encounter of knowledge elaborated in various spheres. Scientific knowledge and everyday knowledge correspond to different rationalities, efficient in their own production and circulation environments. In this article the necessity has been indicated of a profound analysis of the relations between the suppositions and logic of the methodology of popular education and the suppositions and logic of the popular way of thinking or that of the participating cultural group. The problem is how to achieve a real synthesis in order to enrich and improve everyday interpretations for more efficient action and, in contrast, how to improve scientific knowledge regarding its pertinency and relevance to specific social contexts different from the own production environment.

This link of knowledge presents a methodological problem with consequences for the techniques employed or group dynamics and the type of pedagogical relationship to be built up during the educational process. The challenge consists in designing participatory techniques that transmit information not coming from the group, and the specialization of the educator's role without implying a mere imposition or power because of his knowledge.

In present-day discussions, the 'horizontal' pedagogical relation, as formulated in the discourses on popular education is being questioned. Although participatory processes are promoted, the educator always keeps a certain specific character and power in the pedagogical act. Various investigations and experiences have demonstrated how difficult it is to realize the idea of horizontal relations in pedagogical practice. Accepting the specificity of the educator's work, one also accepts his responsibility with regard to the conduct of the process. But the problem of the educator is how to combine leadership with the equalizing discourse on which most of his action is based.

In this debate, the theme of transmission of knowledge and power appears to be very important. In fact, popular education does not consist of a vertical and linear transmission of knowledge. Since popular education implies working with adults, it depends on the accumulated knowledge and experiences of the participating group. So, the beneficiaries of these experiences are developing a process of interpretation and selection and they place the subject-matter of teaching in the context of their everyday reality.

But this process also, will produce an effect on the educators and their own knowledge. In any educational activity based on the combination of knowledge it is important to ask oneself what is happening with the knowledge of the proper educator. Reflecting on this type of problem, educators were worried about the systematization of their own experiences. Basically, it is an activity of applied investigation pretending to recover the knowledge created by the experience itself. Unfortunately, not all the educators accept this type of reflection. On the one hand, somehow the idea of investigation, associated with the traditional 'positivist-style-investigation', is 'rejected'. On the other hand, teams have no time or resources to organize this activity.

If the improvement of quality of popular education practices is desired, it is necessary to accept this problem. Various authors and promoters of these initiatives have agreed that new types of investigation are needed to produce a more profound and solid knowledge regarding the results and characteristics of the promoted experiences. This knowledge is of fundamental importance to spread the work results, to be involved in the formation of professionals working with the popular sectors and to participate in the debates on poverty problems and social policies in society.

These redefinitions regarding popular education are proceeding in a new social context. In fact, Latin America is facing particular processes of democratic consolidation. Therefore a new type of relation between the State and civil society is needed. Popular education experiences are no longer perceived as an alternative for authoritarian 'excluding' states. On the contrary, the profile of these experiences is one of collaboration between originality and the tasks of democratization and overcoming poverty. For this reason, many popular education projects develop actions in collaboration with local municipalities, ministries or other centralized institutions. In this context, it appeared to be important to link popular education with school in order to collaborate for the improvement of its quality and cultural relevancy through the participation of the parents and the involvement of the local teachers.

In conclusion, popular education faces numerous challenges in this decade of the 90s. They concern theoretical and practical challenges resulting from the accumulated experience and the legitimacy

achieved in the countries of Latin America. Today, the people of this movement and of the national and international institutions collaborating in its development have to accomplish this task.